

Kissinger and the SALT Talks

By ROBERT L. BARTLEY

In an extraordinary press conference last week, Secretary of State Kissinger spent over an hour discussing a single topic: alleged Soviet violations of the strategic arms treaty. But for some of us who have been closely following the charges, the performance did little to quiet already intense apprehensions.

Indeed, anything but, since the center of these apprehensions is not the Soviet authorities but the American authorities. The Russians are only behaving like Russians. Which is to say, legalistic minds can quibble over whether the Soviets have "violated" the treaty, but they have come close enough often enough to make clear that the U.S. has contracted with systers. In January, Secretary Kissinger will go off to Moscow to write another contract with them, covering areas even more difficult and ambiguous than the first one did. The attitudes he displayed in his briefing last week are not those you would seek out in picking a lawyer to deal with shysters.

Mr. Kissinger's villains are not the Russians but the Americans who have raised the issue of Soviet compliance. No one would deny, of course, that the Secretary has a right to defend his record. And when faced with sharp charges from Admiral Elmo Zumwalt it's understandable that he would snap "the admiral got carried away by his political ambitions." But what was missing was similar skepticism about Soviet motives. Indeed, the worst thing the Secretary had to say about the Russians was that the "most serious" compliance case "comes close to the borderline of a possible violation." There was no hint of anything seriously amiss in Soviet behavior, and considering the issues at hand, one wonders when defense of Mr. Kissinger's record becomes a pleading of the Soviet case.

The alleged violations cover a dozen or more complex and technical issues, but their general texture is evident enough in, say, the matter of the ILL-X silos. The arms agreement specifies that neither side shall build new "fixed land-based intercontinental missile launchers." Since the agreement was signed, something on the order of 260 new silos have appeared in the Soviet missile fields. Upon American questioning, the Soviets say these are not missile launchers but command and control centers. So far they have not been caught putting missiles into these new holes and Mr. Kissinger told the press the CIA agrees that they are in fact command and control centers.

Secretary Kissinger did not deign to mention that these "command and control centers" do not replace older centers, are cylindrical, have ICBM launcher-type suspension systems and "blow away" silo lids. The only plausible explanation for the blow-away lids is that the silos are designed for easy conversion into a missile-launching role, giving the Soviets the option of expanding their missile force by 200 in a few weeks or a few years. Now, is this a violation?

Legalistically, the answer is probably "not yet." But, in his first public explanation of these issues, the American Secretary of State might have let the American people know that their representatives are coping with people who build command and control silos with blow-away lids.

Or, take the latest major compliance issue to surface publicly, the new Soviet ABM radar on the Kamchatka peninsula across from Alaska. Presumably this is currently a test facility; Mr. Kissinger said the radar "faces" back into the Soviet

Union. The 1972 ABM treaty has provisions covering test ranges, namely that test facilities must be "located within current or additionally agreed test ranges."

In negotiating arms agreements, the Soviets consistently refuse to state what arms they have. When the ABM treaty was negotiated they declined to say where their test ranges were. So the Americans issued

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a unilateral statement saying that the American ranges were at White Sands, N. Mex. and Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific, that the current Soviet range was near Sary Shagan in Kazakhstan, and that further test ranges would require "prior agreement." The Soviets replied that there was a "common understanding" as to what ABM test ranges were, that the reference to "additionally agreed" ranges was "sufficiently clear" and that national means of intelligence permitted identifying current ranges.

Now if you tell someone you see three apples, and he says he agrees what an apple is and that you can see them, normal rules of discourse allow you to conclude he agrees there are three apples. So American negotiators took the Soviet reply as an affirmation. And in the letter transmitting the 1972 treaty to President Nixon, Secretary of State Rogers wrote, "The current Soviet test range for ABM systems is located near Sary Shagan, Kazakhstan SSR. ABM components are not to be deployed at any other test ranges without prior agreement between the parties."

The new Kamchatka radar is some 3,000 miles from Kazakhstan, but the Soviets did not ask for any prior agreement before building it. Some American negotiators responsible for compliance issues have proposed to ask them to ask the U.S. for an agreement, so that the Americans could give their prior consent retroactively. Secretary Kissinger said that if they had asked there would have been no problem and that if they ask today there would be "no significant problem."

Well, the military problems with the radar are not trivial, since it's relatively easy to give an existing radar a new face and 360-degree capability and since the Kamchatka radar is ideally located to become a keystone of some future nationwide system. But the significant problem is something else: the contempt in which the Soviets hold the terms of the treaty, and the inability to depend on even the simplest and most logical inference from their statements.

The compliance issue that most directly affects the strategic balance arises from a clause in the agreement saying, "the parties undertake not to convert land-based launchers for light ICBM's . . . into land-based launchers for heavy ICBM's . . ." American negotiators were worried about the Soviet advantage in throw weight, or missile payload, and accordingly the agreement froze the number of huge Soviet SS-9 missiles. But since the treaty the Soviets have added as much additional throw weight as they could have achieved by doubling the SS-9 force. In particular, they

have been replacing their "light" SS-11 missile with the new SS-19, about 50% larger.

When the agreement was negotiated, typically, the Soviets declined to define the term "heavy." This issue was outstanding as President Nixon arrived in Moscow for the summit. On May 26, the day the treaty was signed, the American delegation issued a unilateral statement stating that it considered a "heavy" missile to be any missile significantly larger than the largest current "light" missile, which was the SS-11. It said the U.S. "proceeds on the premise that the Soviet side will give due account to this consideration."

Last week Secretary Kissinger said that the U.S. side is trying to limit the SS-19 in the current round of SALT-II. He added that "it is at least open to question whether the United States can hold the Soviet Union responsible for its own statements when the Soviet Union has asserted that it does not accept that interpretation."

That's fair enough to the Soviets, perhaps. But what about fairness to the American officials in the Pentagon and the Senate who relied on the unilateral declaration in giving their assent to the agreement? Many of them based their assessment that the treaty did not endanger U.S. security on the assumption that the U.S. would react in its own deployments if the Soviets breached the stated definition of a "heavy" missile. The attacks on the current position from former Defense Secretary Melvin Laird and former Navy Chief Zumwalt must be understood in this light. And as the Senate debated ratification of the treaty part of the agreement, Mr. Kissinger himself specifically assured its members that the U.S. had the "safeguard" that no missile heavier than the SS-11 could be introduced.